

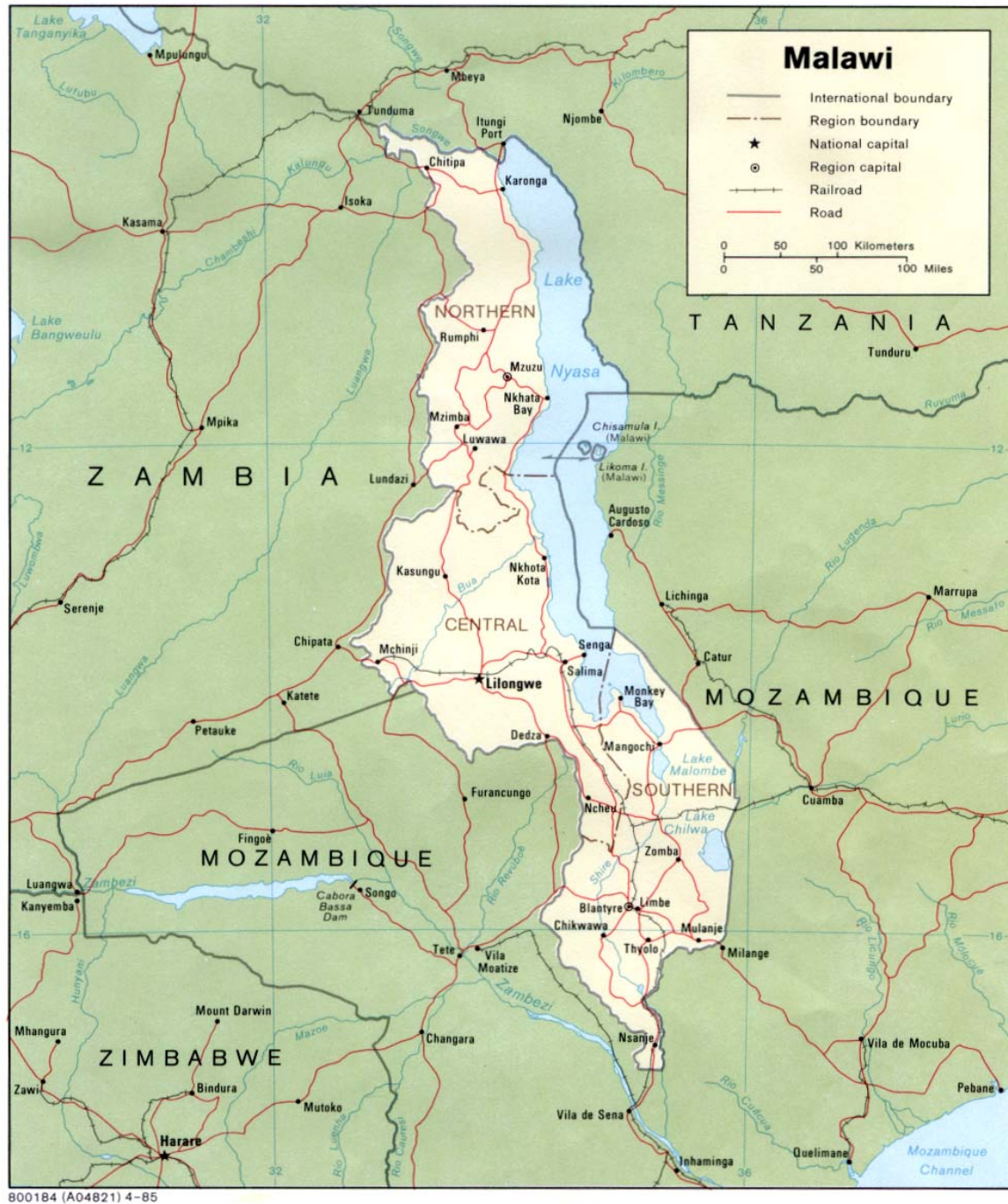
THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

# MALAWI



**A PEACE CORPS RESOURCE FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS**

**April 2015**



## A WELCOME LETTER

To Prospective Volunteers:

Greetings from Malawi, the “Warm Heart of Africa!” On behalf of the entire staff, we are delighted that you are considering becoming a member of the Peace Corps/Malawi family. The Malawian people are kind, warm, and generous; the countryside is breathtaking; and, most importantly, there is a real opportunity to make a difference.

Malawi faces many challenges: infrastructure is weak, poverty and hunger are common, health status is low, educational opportunities are limited, the economy is struggling, and there have been problems of accountability and transparency. But, with challenges come opportunities. At the request of the government of Malawi, the Peace Corps works in three areas of great need: education, health, and the environment. As a Volunteer, you will have extraordinary opportunities to help Malawi move forward as a nation.

As a Volunteer, you will also be making an important commitment—a commitment that will include many challenges and frustrations, but also success, personal growth, inspiration, and great joy. The Peace Corps truly changed my life through my own service as a Volunteer, and I am sure it will change yours. The decision to serve in the Peace Corps should not be made lightly. It is a commitment that will be tested repeatedly throughout your two years as a Volunteer. You will be challenged in every way imaginable, and in some ways you have not imagined. But you will grow, stretch, and leave Malawi as a changed person.

Being a Peace Corps Volunteer is an honor and a privilege. The old saying is accurate: It is “the toughest job you’ll ever love.” Our trainers and staff are here to walk alongside you on your journey: We are all committed to working together to leave a lasting impact. Please consider the content of this welcome book carefully before accepting this opportunity to serve the people of Malawi.

Warmest regards,

Carol Spahn  
Country Director  
Lilongwe, Malawi  
Office: 265-1-757-157

*As a Volunteer I intended to change the world but found, instead, the world changed me.*

Check us out at <http://malawi.peacecorps.gov>



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## **CORE EXPECTATIONS FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS**

In working toward fulfilling the Peace Corps mission of promoting world peace and friendship, as a trainee and Volunteer, you are expected to do the following:

1. Prepare your personal and professional life to make a commitment to serve abroad for a full term of 27 months
2. Commit to improving the quality of life of the people with whom you live and work and, in doing so, share your skills, adapt them, and learn new skills as needed
3. Serve where the Peace Corps asks you to go, under conditions of hardship if necessary, and with the flexibility needed for effective service
4. Recognize that your successful and sustainable development work is based on the local trust and confidence you build by living in, and respectfully integrating yourself into, your host community and culture
5. Recognize that you are responsible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for your personal conduct and professional performance
6. Engage with host country partners in a spirit of cooperation, mutual learning, and respect
7. Work within the rules and regulations of the Peace Corps and the local and national laws of the country where you serve
8. Exercise judgment and personal responsibility to protect your health, safety, and well-being and that of others
9. Recognize that you will be perceived, in your host country and community, as a representative of the people, cultures, values, and traditions of the United States of America
10. Represent responsively the people, cultures, values, and traditions of your host country and community to people in the United States both during and following your service

# PEACE CORPS/MALAWI HISTORY AND PROGRAMS

## History of the Peace Corps in Malawi

The first Peace Corps Volunteers arrived in Malawi in 1963, just prior to its independence. Most Volunteers worked on education and health projects, and numbers quickly grew to more than 350 Volunteers. Under the very conservative Banda regime, the program was suspended for several years due to the “nonconformist” role of some Volunteers, but the program was restored in 1978. Since that time, the program has continued to evolve and has developed a close working relationship with the government of Malawi.

The change of government in 1994 opened up the possibility of placing Volunteers in rural villages for the first time (under the prior regime, foreigners were not allowed to live at the village level). With the increased flexibility in programming, the Peace Corps began working with counterpart ministries to focus programming efforts and identify more appropriate areas for collaboration at the community level.

## History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Malawi

### Programming in Malawi

Peace Corps/Malawi focuses on three main areas of vital need: health, education, and natural resource management. Projects in these sectors have evolved over the years based on the needs of the government and communities with whom the Peace Corps works.

## HIV & AIDS

The Malawi program team identified HIV as one of its cross-sector program areas. The post is currently working on mainstreaming HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and support activities in all sectors. All Volunteers undergo HIV/AIDS sessions during pre-service and in-service trainings. In addition, programming staff arranges for HIV/AIDS-related stand-alone workshops to prepare Volunteers for their community work. Volunteers are also provided with technical assistance and support for community projects, initiatives, grant opportunities, and resources, such as informational/educational materials, tools, and human resources (experts within partner organizations and/or sister agencies).

The AIDS pandemic strikes across all social strata in many Peace Corps countries. The loss of teachers has crippled education systems, while illness and disability drains family income and forces governments and donors to redirect limited resources from other priorities. In the past, a diagnosis of HIV/AIDS was considered an immediate death sentence for those infected. The advent of anti-retroviral treatment has meant that people can live much longer and better than before. The need for HIV/AIDS education, prevention, and care messages becomes paramount to ensure positive living. As Volunteers strive to integrate into their communities, they will develop relationships with local people who might die during their service. Because of the AIDS pandemic, some Volunteers will be regularly meeting with HIV-positive people and working with training staff, office staff, and host family members living with the AIDS virus.

Volunteers need to prepare themselves to embrace these relationships in a sensitive and positive manner. Likewise, malaria, a leading cause of both morbidity and mortality of children under age 5, and malnutrition, especially protein-energy deficiencies, motor vehicle accidents, and other unintentional injuries, domestic violence, and corporal punishment are all problems Volunteers might face. They will need to anticipate these situations and utilize supportive resources available throughout their training and service to maintain their own emotional health so they can continue to be of service to their community.



## **Community Health and HIV/AIDS Project**

Malawi ranks among the countries most severely affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic and is also severely affected by many other serious health conditions. The Peace Corps HIV/AIDS and community health project (CHP) works in collaboration with the Ministry of Health to address some of the health issues in rural areas. Volunteers work in areas of HIV/AIDS education, orphan care, youth and at-risk groups, maternal and child health programs, communicable and noncommunicable disease prevention (e.g., water-related diseases and nutritional disorders), environmental health, and women/girls' empowerment activities. For many years, Peace Corps/Malawi had the only stand-alone HIV/AIDS project in the Peace Corps, and HIV/AIDS continues to be the cornerstone for health activities.

## **Health Systems Strengthening**

Since 1994, the government of Malawi has undertaken a number of reforms in the civil service in order to focus on its core activities in the ministries and departments. One of the reforms was the establishment of the decentralization program, which empowers the local people to make decisions that affect their district. The decentralization policy adopted in 1998 empowered the 28 district assemblies to work as local governments. Peace Corps/Malawi has utilized the Peace Corps Response program, which offers short-term assignments for qualified professionals, to aim at strengthening the local governments in their district-level response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic in light of the challenges of limited human, financial, and technical resources. Peace Corps Response Volunteers, funded by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), provide HIV/AIDS technical support in capacity building and systems strengthening to support Malawi's HIV/AIDS efforts at the district level.

## **Secondary Education Project**

Peace Corps/Malawi's secondary education project (SEP) provides teachers and teacher development facilitators (TDFs) to community day secondary schools (CDSS), which are community-initiated and -supported institutions. Volunteers teach physical science, mathematics, biology, and English. The Malawi educational system continues to face serious challenges in providing quality education. The initiation of free primary education in 1994 has greatly increased the need for schools, teachers, infrastructure, and resources, such as learning resources and materials. The project emphasizes girls' education and life-skills training, and uses community content-based instruction techniques.

## **Community-Based Natural Resources Management**

This project focuses on community-based management of natural resources in protected areas, such as national parks, game reserves, forest reserves, and other village/community forest areas. Volunteers work with border communities on the efficient and sustainable utilization of limited natural resources. Volunteers' work is accompanied by the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices, small-scale income-generating activities, and agro-forestry interventions requested by communities bordering those protected areas. Volunteers work with motivated individuals and community groups by helping them identify and prioritize needs via a vigorous community assessment process, and then by implementing local projects and activities that address the identified needs. Volunteers also serve as liaisons between parks and wildlife and forestry staff and the local communities.

## **The Global Health Service Partnership (GHSP)**

In 2013, Peace Corps/Malawi was selected as one of three Peace Corps posts to pilot the Global Health Service Partnership (GHSP) program. In partnership with SEED Global Health and PEPFAR, and through coordination with Peace Corps Response, the GHSP program trains and deploys nurses, physicians, and other health professionals to serve as adjunct faculty in medical or nursing schools to address critical shortages in qualified health-care professionals. By working alongside local faculty counterparts, the Peace Corps works to expand the pool of well-trained health professionals in Malawi.

## **COUNTRY OVERVIEW: MALAWI AT A GLANCE**

### **History**

Malawi is a small country in southeast Africa, known for its natural beauty and its warm, hard-working people. The first significant Western contact began with the arrival of David Livingstone in 1859. Fiery sunlight glittering from Lake Nyasa gave the name “Malawi”—land of flaming waters—to an ancient Bantu empire. Present-day descendants revived the name when the British Protectorate of Nyasaland became independent in 1964.

The country is considered something of a success story in African political development. In 1994, after 30 years of one-party, dictatorial rule dating back to independence from Britain, Malawi quietly and peacefully elected a new government committed to multiparty democracy. In spite of the wave of euphoria over their newly won freedom, the Malawian people continue to face the obstacles of poverty, drought, environmental degradation, hunger, disease, rising crime, and illiteracy on their path to social, political, and economic reform.

### **Government**

Malawi has a parliamentary system of government with the president as the head of state. The president sets the agenda for parliamentary debate. Peaceful presidential elections were held in 1999, 2004, and 2009. In 2012, following the sudden death of President Bingu wa Mutharika, Vice President Joyce Banda succeeded him by constitutional mandate, becoming the second female head of state on the African continent. In May 2014, Malawi conducted its first ever tripartite elections in which the Malawi Electoral Commission held presidential, parliamentary, and local government elections at the same time. Peter Mutharika bested three other candidates, including Banda, to become Malawi’s president.

Four parties dominate the political landscape. President ’ Mutahrika’s party is the ’Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). There is also the People’s Party (PP) of Joyce Banda; the United Democratic Front (UDF), the party of former President Bakili Muluzi now run by his son Atupele; and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) of Lazarus Chakwera, the first party that ruled Malawi for 30 years after independence from Britain. The official capital of Malawi Lilongwe, located in the country’s central region, grown immensely in the last few years. The overall population in Lilongwe is larger than the southern regional hub, Blantyre, and was estimated to be more than 1 million in 2015. Lilongwe is the political center of Malawi, but Blantyre remains the economic capital.

### **Economy**

Malawi has a narrow economic base with little industry. Agriculture forms the mainstay of Malawi’s economy, accounting for nearly half of its gross domestic product (GDP). Tobacco, tea, and sugar generate more than 70 percent of export earnings, with tobacco providing the lion’s share (more than 60 percent). The agricultural sector employs nearly half of those formally employed and directly or indirectly supports an estimated 85 percent of the population. With the advent of producing uranium at Kayerekera mines in Karonga (northern Malawi) by Palladin Africa, there has been an increased focus on the mining industry. As a landlocked country, transportation costs make imported goods very expensive. South Africa is Malawi’s most important trading partner.

### **People and Culture**

Malawi is one of Africa’s most densely populated countries, with a population of approximately 15 million in a land area roughly the size of Indiana. The African population includes seven principal tribes: Chewa, Tumbuka, Yao, Sena, Lomwe, Ngoni, and Nkhonde. Although there are distinct linguistic and cultural differences among ethnic groups, geographic region tends to be the predominate means of group identification. English is the official language, though it is not commonly used outside major urban

centers. More than 50 percent of the people speak Chichewa, the national language, and almost everyone understands it.

Malawi is predominantly a Christian country, but it also has a sizeable Islamic population, mostly located along the southern lakeshore. Along with the major organized religions, animist beliefs are still strong in many areas of the country, and these beliefs often influence the organized religions, as well. Many religions take different forms that Americans may not be accustomed to, as local cultures and historical beliefs heavily influence these practices.

While living and working in this conservative society, Volunteers will be expected to respect the culture and traditions, and tolerate or adapt to the differences they find.

### **Environment**

Malawi is a narrow country that hugs the western shore of Lake Malawi (sometimes referred to as Lake Nyasa). At places, its land area is barely 50 miles wide. Malawi shares borders with Tanzania, Zambia, and Mozambique. The terrain varies widely and includes grassy slopes, rolling hills, striking rock outcroppings, and dense forests.

Malawi's altitude varies from less than 200 feet above sea level at Nsanje in the south to almost 10,000 feet at the peak of Mount Mulanje. Lake Malawi, about 1,500 feet above sea level and 380 miles long, is Africa's third largest lake and Malawi's major tourist attraction. Imagine a lake that is larger than the state of New Hampshire! Malawi has rainy and dry seasons. The rainy season is from December to April, with the heaviest rainfall between December and March.

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps and Malawi and to connect you to returned Volunteers and other invitees. Please keep in mind that although we try to make sure all these links are active and current, we cannot guarantee it. If you do not have access to the Internet, visit your local library. Libraries offer free Internet usage and often let you print information to take home.

A note of caution: As you surf the Internet, be aware that you may find bulletin boards and chat rooms in which people are free to express opinions about the Peace Corps based on their own experience, including comments by those who were unhappy with their choice to serve in the Peace Corps. These opinions are not those of the Peace Corps or the U.S. government, and we hope you will keep in mind that no two people experience their service in the same way.

### General Information About Malawi

[www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)

The Department of State issues background notes periodically about countries around the world. Find Malawi and learn more about its social and political history. You can also go to the site's international travel section to check on conditions that may affect your safety.

[Gpo.gov/libraries/public/](http://Gpo.gov/libraries/public/)

The U.S. Government Printing Office publishes country studies intermittently.

[lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html)

The Library of Congress provides historical and sociological data on numerous countries.

[http://unstats.un.org/unsd/pocketbook/World\\_Statistics\\_Pocketbook\\_2013\\_edition.pdf](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/pocketbook/World_Statistics_Pocketbook_2013_edition.pdf)

United Nations resource book with 2013 statistical country data

[Data.un.org](http://Data.un.org)

United Nations site with links to data from U.N. member countries

[Wikipedia.org](http://Wikipedia.org)

Search for Malawi to find encyclopedia-type information. Note: As Wikipedia content is user-generated, information may be biased and/or not verified.

[Worldbank.org](http://Worldbank.org)

The World Bank Group's mission is to fight poverty and improve the living standards of people in the developing world. It is a development bank that provides loans, policy advice, technical assistance, and knowledge-sharing services to developing countries to reduce poverty. This site contains a lot of information and resources regarding development.

[Data.worldbank.org/country](http://Data.worldbank.org/country)

Provides information on development indicators on countries, including population, gender, financial, and education, and climate change statistics.

[www.malawi.gov.mw/](http://www.malawi.gov.mw/)

Official website for the government of the Republic of Malawi

## **Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees**

[www.rpcv.org](http://www.rpcv.org)

This is the site of the National Peace Corps Association, made up of returned Volunteers. On this site you can find links to all the Web pages of the “Friends of” groups for most countries of service, comprised of former Volunteers who served in those countries. There are also regional groups that frequently get together for social events and local volunteer activities. Or go straight to the Friends of Malawi site: [www.friendsofmalawi.org](http://www.friendsofmalawi.org)

[www.PeaceCorpsWorldwide.org](http://www.PeaceCorpsWorldwide.org)

This site is hosted by a group of returned Volunteer writers. It is a monthly online publication of essays and Volunteer accounts of their Peace Corps service.

## **Online Articles/Current News Sites About Malawi**

[UN.org/News/](http://UN.org/News/)

The United Nations news service provides coverage of its member states and information about the international peacekeeping organization’s actions and positions.

[VOAnews.com](http://VOAnews.com)

Voice of America, the U.S. government’s multimedia broadcaster, features coverage of news around the world.

<http://www.malawiana.net>

A collection of online news from Malawi

<http://www.zikomo.net/>

A local site with information related to business in Malawi

## **International Development Sites About Malawi**

[www.unaids.org/](http://www.unaids.org/)

Website for the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

[http://www.usaid.gov/locations/sub-saharan\\_africa/countries/malawi/index.html](http://www.usaid.gov/locations/sub-saharan_africa/countries/malawi/index.html)

Overview of USAID’s projects in Malawi

[www.comminit.com/index.html](http://www.comminit.com/index.html)

Site for the Communication Initiative, which includes information on development in general

## **Recommended Books**

### **Books About Malawi**

1. Chanock, Martin. “Law, Custom and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia.” New York, Cambridge University Press, 1985.
2. Msukwa, Louis A.H. “Meeting the Basic Health Needs of Rural Malawi: An Alternative Strategy.” Norwich, England, Geo Books, 1981.
3. Rafael, B.R. “A Short History of Malawi.” Washington, DC, Three Continents Press, 1980.
4. Sanders, Renfield. “Malawi.” (Places and Peoples of the World Series). New York, NY: Chelsea House, 1988.
5. Young, A. and Young, D.M. “A Geography of Malawi.” North Ponfret, VT: Trafalgar, 1991.



6. Dugard, Martin. "Into Africa: The Epic Adventures of Stanley and Livingstone." 2004.

#### **Books About the History of the Peace Corps**

1. Hoffman, Elizabeth Cobbs. "All You Need is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960s." Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.
2. Rice, Gerald T. "The Bold Experiment: JFK's Peace Corps." Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.
3. Stossel, Scott. "Sarge: The Life and Times of Sargent Shriver." Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2004.
4. Meisler, Stanley. "When the World Calls: The Inside Story of the Peace Corps and its First 50 Years." Boston: Beacon Press, 2011.

#### **Books on the Volunteer Experience**

1. Dirlam, Sharon. "Beyond Siberia: Two Years in a Forgotten Place." Santa Barbara, CA: McSeas Books, 2004.
2. Casebolt, Marjorie DeMoss. "Margarita: A Guatemalan Peace Corps Experience." Gig Harbor, WA: Red Apple Publishing, 2000.
3. Erdman, Sarah. "Nine Hills to Nambonkaha: Two Years in the Heart of an African Village." New York, NY: Picador, 2003.
4. Hessler, Peter. "River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze." New York, NY: Perennial, 2001.
5. Kennedy, Geraldine ed. "From the Center of the Earth: Stories out of the Peace Corps." Santa Monica, CA: Clover Park Press, 1991.
6. Thomsen, Moritz. "Living Poor: A Peace Corps Chronicle." Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997 (reprint).



## **LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE**

### **Communications**

#### **Mail**

Few countries in the world offer the level of mail service Americans consider normal in the United States. If you bring expectations for U.S. standards for mail service, you will be setting yourself up for frustration. Mail takes a minimum of three to four weeks to arrive, often longer. Some mail may simply not arrive (fortunately, this is not a frequent occurrence, but it does happen). Not to sound discouraging, but when Volunteers are thousands of miles from their families and friends, communication becomes a very sensitive issue. Please be aware of the reality of mail service in developing countries. Advise your family and friends to number their letters and to include “Air Mail” on the envelopes. Packages take six to nine weeks for airmail, and surface mail packages can take six months. If someone is sending a package, it’s advisable to keep it small and use a padded envelope so it will be treated as a letter.

Despite delays, the Peace Corps strongly encourages you to write to your family regularly (perhaps weekly or biweekly) and to number your letters. Family members will typically become worried if they do not hear from you, so please advise your parents, friends, and relatives that mail is sporadic and they should not worry if they do not receive your letters regularly.

Peace Corps Volunteers in Malawi may receive packages for up to six months after arrival without paying duty and customs taxes. This privilege is for work-related clothing and household items. Duty may be charged on food and cosmetics. Also, valuable items should not be shipped since they sometimes get lost or held up. If duty is charged, the lower the value, the lower the duty.

Your address during training will be  
“Your Name,” PCT  
Peace Corps  
P. O. Box 208  
Lilongwe, Malawi

Once you have become a Volunteer, you will have your mail sent directly to your new address at your site.

#### **Telephones**

Volunteers should not expect email or telephone access during training, though the training center does have a landline for emergency use. Long-distance communication via telephone to the U.S. is available but very expensive. Note that U.S. calling cards (MCI, Sprint, and AT&T) do not work in Malawi. Though you will be given Malawian currency (worth approximately US\$40) to buy a basic phone just before going for site visits during your pre-service training, some Volunteers bring phones from the U.S. that are already unlocked and can function in Malawi. If possible, the phone should have Internet capabilities (preferably a smartphone).

While cellphones have disadvantages, most, though not all, of the country has decent coverage. Volunteers who do not have electricity and need to recharge a cellphone often pay local merchants to charge their phones, or use solar chargers (many Volunteers use Solio products). Telephone communication is quite possible for Volunteers in Malawi, and calling the United States is not as frustrating an experience as it was in recent years. Volunteers are encouraged to establish a system of calling, sending text messages, and writing letters as the best method of regular communication with family and friends and to schedule periodic calls with family as a special treat.

Having a landline phone in your house as a Volunteer is very unlikely due to the rural location of Volunteer sites.

### **Computer, Internet, and Email Access**

Since few Volunteers have electricity in their homes, a laptop can come in handy for writing proposals, classroom materials, managing music on an MP3 player, accessing the Internet with a wireless USB stick sold by mobile subscribers, and composing letters and stories. Office computers with Word and Excel are available in the lounge at the Peace Corps office in Lilongwe. Many larger towns and some major cities also have Internet cafes. Peace Corps/Malawi is not responsible for caring for, updating, or maintaining your computer, so bring back-up copies of your software, and a flash drive. You will also need to bring anti-spy/malware/virus programs that are easy to update, too.

### **Housing and Site Location**

Volunteers in Malawi are posted in the far north in Chitipa to the far south in Nsanje. Volunteers are almost exclusively posted to rural areas—at health centers, community day secondary schools, or in communities surrounding forest or game reserves or other protected areas. Site placement is made during the training period after the staff has had an opportunity to evaluate individual capabilities and strengths. Site placements are determined primarily by work-related needs.

Housing can vary from mud houses with either thatch or tin roofs to fired-brick houses with tin roofs. Most likely, a Volunteer's house will be comparable to co-workers' dwellings. Each Volunteer will receive an allowance to purchase needed settling-in items including basic housing furniture such as a bed, table, and chair. In some cases, housing may be provided by the hosting site: the school, health center, or community. Volunteers might be located anywhere from a 30-minute to a two-day drive from the capital city. Proximity to another Volunteer varies from site to site. Your nearest volunteer neighbor may not be a Peace Corps Volunteer, but may in fact be a volunteer from another country and organization such as the British Volunteers Serving Overseas or the Japan International Cooperation Agency.

Most Volunteers do not have electricity or running water. Water will likely come from a well, and your evenings will be spent reading by lantern and candlelight. Your flexibility and adaptability will be important as you adjust to these new conditions.

During pre-service training, trainees stay with—and share most meals with—host families. Home stay is considered one of the most important aspects of the training program and is required for this period. During home stay, trainees will have language and cross-culture facilitators and technical trainers staying with them in the same villages.

### **Living Allowance and Money Management**

Volunteers receive a monthly allowance in Malawi kwacha that is sufficient to live at the level of the local people. The allowance covers food, housing, household supplies, clothing, transportation to and from work, utilities, recreation and entertainment, and incidental expenses. Peace Corps Volunteers are expected to live at a level that is comparable with that of their host country counterparts. The Peace Corps discourages Volunteers from supplementing their living allowance with funds from home.

The amount for this allowance is based on regular surveys of Volunteers and costs of living in Malawi. The living allowance is paid monthly into Volunteer bank accounts, so the ability to manage funds wisely is important. Included in the monthly allowance is a travel and accommodation allowance, which should be sufficient for necessary trips to and from Lilongwe and from your site for official workshops, medical appointments, and so forth. You may find that you will be receiving more remuneration than your counterpart or supervisor.

You will also receive a leave allowance (standard in all Peace Corps countries) each month. This allowance is paid in local currency, along with your living allowance.

Volunteers suggest you bring traveler's checks, cash, and credit cards for vacation travel. Note that it is possible to access a U.S. bank account with a major debit card at most ATMs in major urban areas (you may withdraw only kwacha, not dollars). The amount of cash or traveler's checks you will need will depend on the amount of traveling you plan to do while serving in Malawi. Only a few local establishments accept credit cards, so they are mainly useful for travel to other countries.

## **Food and Diet**

The staple food in Malawi is maize (corn), prepared as a thick porridge called *nsima* and eaten with vegetables or beans. Many fruits and vegetables grow in Malawi and, with a little creativity, you can enjoy a widely varied diet. Most Volunteers prepare their own food, although after becoming more familiar with their site assignment, some eat with neighbors or hire someone to help with household work, including cooking. Fruits and vegetables are available in-season, which means some things will not be available at the market year round. Meat and dairy products are available in the towns, though they can be expensive.

Trainees and Volunteers who are vegetarians will be able to eat well in Malawi after becoming familiar with local food items and their preparation. Most Malawians do not understand vegetarianism and will not normally be prepared to serve a vegetarian meal if you are a guest in their home (even if they do not regularly eat meat because of the expense). However, a sensitive explanation about your preferences will be accepted. Most vegetarian Volunteers have no difficulty after their initial adjustment.

## **Transportation**

Volunteers' primary modes of transport are public buses and *matolas* (usually small pickup trucks loaded with people and goods). Buses and mini-buses travel among towns on irregular schedules (i.e., they leave when they are full), so travel in Malawi is never a timed affair.

All Volunteers receive a mountain bike to facilitate their work. Whenever you ride a bicycle, it is mandatory to wear a helmet that is provided by the Peace Corps. The bikes issued are usually men's bikes that can be difficult to ride wearing a skirt. Many women wear shorts or leggings under their skirts to solve this problem.

Volunteers are not allowed to drive and/or operate motor vehicles or motorcycles (two- or three-wheeled), except under specific circumstances which will be explained once you are sworn in.

## **Geography and Climate**

Malawi is south of the equator, so the seasons will be opposite of those in the United States. The geography of Malawi is dominated by Lake Malawi, which stretches down most of the eastern side of the country. The lake is a beautiful setting for many activities and also provides approximately 85 percent of the freshwater tropical aquarium fish in the world.

In June, July, and August the temperatures will range from 35° Fahrenheit in the higher elevations to 60° F to 70° F near the shore of Lake Malawi. The hottest months are October, November, and December. Temperatures will range from 70° F in the high elevations up to 95° F in the lower elevations. In the cool season, sweaters or jackets are useful. In the hot season, loose-fitting cotton clothes are best. The rainy season starts in November or December and lasts through April. The rest of the year is quite dry.



## **Social Activities**

Malawi has a limited number of television stations, which offer a few local news segments and programming from South Africa and Europe. There are several FM radio stations, some of which play popular music. Many Volunteers bring short-wave radios so that they can listen to international broadcasts (BBC, Voice of America, Radio Deuschewella, etc.). The most common form of entertainment is social interaction among friends and neighbors. Volunteers are encouraged to remain at their sites in order to integrate and develop relationships with their community, but an occasional trip to the district capital for banking and restocking of supplies is needed, as well. These trips will be coordinated with the programming staff.

## **Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior**

Malawians value appearance and norms for dress here are much more conservative than in the United States. In the United States, Americans view their clothing as a reflection of their individuality. In Malawi, your dress is seen as a sign of your respect to those around you. Clothes that are dirty, have holes in them, or are “too revealing” are not appreciated by Malawians. Wearing them will reduce the level of respect shown to you and your effectiveness. If you need to choose between T-shirts and blouses, choose blouses. Pants and shorts for women, while now legal in Malawi (the national dress code was discontinued after Banta was replaced in 1994), are not appropriate at work or in public in many places. Men also prefer to wear nicer pants, shirts, and even neckties for teaching school or working in an office.

One of the difficulties of finding your place as a Peace Corps Volunteer is fitting into the local culture while maintaining your own identity and serving in a professional role all at the same time. It is not an easy balance to strike, and Peace Corps/Malawi staff can only provide you with guidelines. You will be working as a representative of a government ministry and, as such, you are expected to dress and behave accordingly. While some of your counterparts may dress in seemingly worn or shabby clothes, this will be due to economics rather than choice. The likelihood is that they are wearing their “best.” A foreigner wearing ragged, dirty, or torn clothing is likely to be considered an affront.

Adhering to appropriate dress is important in Malawi, and if you have reservations about your ability or willingness to do so, you should evaluate your decision to become a Peace Corps Volunteer. Volunteering to work effectively in another culture requires a certain level of sacrifice and flexibility that can be difficult for some people. You are expected to behave in a manner that will foster respect within your community and reflect well on the Peace Corps. You need to be aware that because certain behavior may jeopardize the Peace Corps program and your personal safety, it cannot be tolerated, and could lead to administrative separation, a decision by the Peace Corps to terminate your service.

## **Personal Safety**

More detailed information about the Peace Corps’ approach to safety is contained in the Safety and Security section, but it is an important issue and cannot be overemphasized. As stated in the Volunteer Handbook, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment (oftentimes alone), having a limited understanding of local language and culture, and being perceived as well-off are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Many Volunteers experience varying degrees of unwanted attention and harassment. Petty thefts and burglaries are not uncommon, and incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although most Malawi Volunteers complete their two years of service without incident. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help reduce the risks and enhance your safety and security. These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Malawi. Using these tools, one can be empowered to take responsibility for his or her safety and well-being.

Each staff member at the Peace Corps is committed to providing Volunteers with the support they need to successfully meet the challenges they will face to have a safe, healthy, and productive service. Volunteers and families are encouraged to look at safety and security information on the Peace Corps website at [www.peacecorps.gov/safety](http://www.peacecorps.gov/safety).

Information on these pages gives messages on Volunteer health and Volunteer safety. There is a section titled Safety and Security in Depth. Among topics addressed are the risks of serving as a Volunteer, posts' safety support systems, and emergency planning and communications.

### **Rewards and Frustrations**

Although the potential for job satisfaction is very high, all Volunteers encounter numerous frustrations. Perceptions of time are very different from the United States, the lack of basic infrastructure can become very tiring, the host agencies do not always provide expected support in a timely manner, and Malawians generally perceive Americans as very rich. These are all very common frustrations that Malawi Volunteers experience. The Peace Corps experience is often described as an intense series of emotional peaks and valleys that occur while you adapt to the new culture.

As a Volunteer, you will be given a great deal of responsibility and independence in your work—perhaps more than in any other job you will ever have. Often you will need to motivate yourself and others with little guidance. You may work for months with little visible impact and without receiving feedback on your work. Development is a slow process. You must possess the self-confidence, patience, and vision to continue working toward long-term goals without seeing immediate results.

To approach and overcome these difficulties, you will need maturity, flexibility, open-mindedness, and resourcefulness. Judging by the experience of former Volunteers, the peaks are well worth the difficult times, and most Volunteers leave Malawi feeling they have gained more than they sacrificed during their service. If you are able to make the commitment to integrate into your community and work hard, your service could be a truly life-altering experience.



## **PEACE CORPS TRAINING**

### **Pre-Service Training**

The Peace Corps uses a competency-based training approach throughout the continuum of learning, supporting you from arrival in Malawi to your departure. Pre-service training (PST) is the first event within this continuum of learning and ensures that you are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively perform your job. Pre-service training is conducted in Malawi by Peace Corps staff, most of whom are locally hired trainers. Peace Corps staff measure achievement of learning and determine if you have successfully achieved competencies, including language standards, for swearing-in as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Peace Corps training incorporates widely accepted principles of adult learning and is structured around the experiential learning cycle. Successful training results in competence in various technical, linguistic, cross-cultural, health, and safety and security areas.

Integrating into the community is one of the core competencies you will strive to achieve both in PST and during the first several months of service. Successful sustainable development work is based on the relationships you build by respectfully integrating into the host country community and culture.

You will be prepared for this through a homestay experience, which often requires trainees to live with host families during PST. Integration into the community fosters language and cross-cultural learning and ensures your health, safety, and security.

PST will provide you with the essential skills needed to successfully carry out your service in Malawi. The skills focus on integrating into your community and developing and implementing an appropriate work plan with your community and counterparts. Training includes five major components: technical, cross-cultural, language instruction, personal health and safety, and policies, including the role of the Volunteer in development.

PST in Malawi is conducted using a community-based integrated training (CBT) model. All training takes place in the community as opposed to a training center. Community-based training is a more difficult training model in some respects, as the learning environment is real, not artificial. During training, most of your time will be spent in villages and communities with conditions similar to where you will be placed as a Volunteer. Your trainers create a learning environment, with experiences and meetings designed to allow you to develop the knowledge and skills needed for your work as a Volunteer. Throughout your training, you will live with a Malawian family and work in villages and schools.

### **Technical Training**

Technical training will prepare you to work in Malawi by building on the skills you already have and helping you develop new skills in a manner appropriate to the needs of the country. The Peace Corps staff, Malawi experts, and current Volunteers will conduct the training program. Training places great emphasis on learning how to transfer the skills you have to the community in which you will serve as a Volunteer.

Technical training will include global core and sector-specific sessions, as well as sessions on the general economic and political environment in Malawi and strategies for working within such a framework. You will be introduced to your project framework which provides your sector's strategic plan. You will continually be supported and evaluated throughout training and also given feedback in order to build the confidence and skills you need to undertake your project activities and be a productive member of your community.

## **Language Training**

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will find that language skills are key to personal and professional satisfaction during your service. These skills are critical to your job performance, they help you integrate into your community, and they can ease your personal adaptation to the new surroundings. Therefore, language training is at the heart of the training program. You must successfully meet minimum language requirements to complete training and become a Volunteer. Malawi language facilitators teach formal language classes six days a week in small groups of four to five.

Your language training will incorporate a community-based approach. In addition to classroom time, you will be given assignments to work on outside of the classroom and with your host family. The goal is to get you to a point of basic social communication skills so you can practice and develop language skills further once you are at your site. Prior to being sworn in as a Volunteer, you will work on strategies to continue language studies during your service.

## **Cross-Cultural Training**

Cross-cultural training will provide opportunities for you to reflect on your own cultural values and how they influence your behavior in Malawi. You will also discuss the questions you have about the behaviors and practices you observe in Malawi, exploring the underlying reasons for these behaviors and practices.

Cross-cultural and community development training will help you improve your communication skills and understand your role as a facilitator of development. Training will cover topics such as the concept of time, power and hierarchy, gender roles, communication styles, and the concept of self and relationships. Because adjusting to a new culture can be very challenging, you will participate in resiliency training which provides a framework and tools to help with adjustment issues.

As part of your PST, you will live with a Malawi host family. This experience is designed to ease your transition to life at your site. Families go through an orientation conducted by Peace Corps staff to explain the purpose of PST and to assist them in helping you adapt to living in Malawi. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

You will be exposed to topics such as community mobilization, conflict resolution, gender and development, nonformal and adult education strategies, and political structures.

## **Health Training**

During pre-service training, you will be trained in health prevention, basic first aid, and basic treatment of medical illnesses found in Malawi. You will be expected to practice preventive health and to take responsibility for your own health by adhering to all medical policies. Trainees are required to attend all medical sessions. Health education topics will cover nutrition, food and water preparation, emotional health, alcohol awareness, prevention of HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), common illnesses, domestic and intimate partner violence, emergencies, and medical policies in Malawi.

## **Safety Training**

During the safety training sessions, you will learn how to adopt a lifestyle that reduces your risks at home, at work, and during your travels. You will also learn appropriate, effective strategies for coping with unwanted attention, how to identify safety risks in-country, and about the Peace Corps' emergency response and support systems.

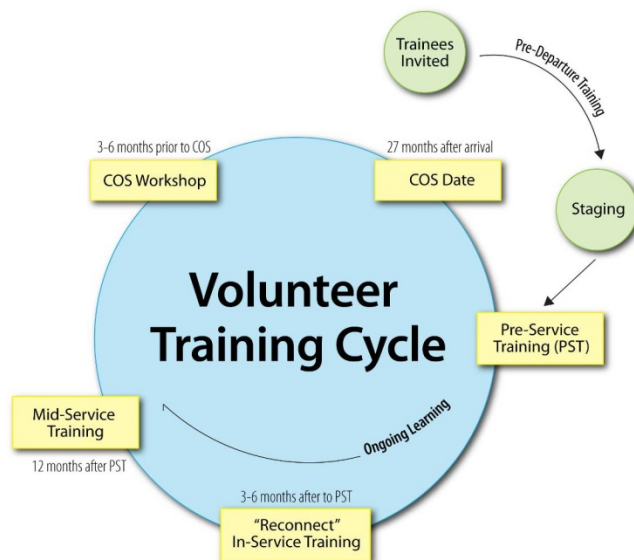


## Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service

The Peace Corps' training system provides Volunteers with continual opportunities to examine their commitment to Peace Corps service while increasing their technical and cross-cultural skills. During service, there are usually three training events. The titles and objectives for those trainings are as follows:

- **In-service training:** Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to upgrade their technical, language, and project development skills while sharing their experiences and reaffirming their commitment after having served for three to six months.
- **Midservice training** (done in conjunction with technical sector in-service): Assists Volunteers in reviewing their first year, reassessing their personal and project objectives, and planning for their second year of service.
- **Close-of-service conference:** Prepares Volunteers for their future after Peace Corps service and reviews their respective projects and personal experiences.

The number, length, and design of these trainings are adapted to country-specific needs and conditions. The key to the training system is that training events are integrated and interrelated, from the pre-departure orientation through the end of your service, and are planned, implemented, and evaluated cooperatively by the training staff, Peace Corps staff, and Volunteers.





## **YOUR HEALTH CARE IN MALAWI**

The Peace Corps' highest priority is maintaining the good health and safety of every Volunteer. Peace Corps medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative, approach to disease. The Peace Corps in Malawi maintains a clinic with two full-time medical officers and medical assistant, who take care of Volunteers' primary health-care needs, including evaluation and treatment of most medical conditions. Additional medical services, such as testing and basic treatment, are also available in Malawi at local hospitals. If you become seriously ill and cannot receive the care you need in Malawi, you will be transported either to a Peace Corps-approved regional medical facility in South Africa. If the Office of Health Services (OHS) determines that the care is not optimal for your condition at the regional facility, you will be transported to the United States.

### **Health Issues in Malawi**

Most of the medical issues in Malawi are also found in the United States, such as colds, diarrhea, skin infections, headaches, minor injuries, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), adjustment disorders, and emotional problems. These problems may be more frequent or compounded by life in another culture. The medical problems specific to Malawi are typical of any developing tropical country. Malaria, HIV/AIDS, schistosomiasis, gastrointestinal infections, typhoid fever, and hepatitis are all common health conditions. Almost all are universally preventable with appropriate knowledge and interventions. Because malaria is endemic in Malawi, taking anti-malarial suppressive medications is mandatory for all Volunteers. You will also be vaccinated against hepatitis A and B, meningitis, tetanus, typhoid, and rabies.

It is important that you know there are extremely limited counseling options in Malawi, and no therapists are available for extended counseling services. Monitoring mental health conditions is difficult, at best. There are no support groups for recovered or recovering alcoholics in Malawi. Alcohol is an integral part of many social interactions, and you may be pressured to drink, as there is little understanding of alcoholism here.

Malawi is one of the countries most severely affected by HIV/AIDS. AIDS is a sexually transmitted disease and concerns all sexually active individuals, regardless of sexual orientation. You will receive specific information in training related to HIV/AIDS and prevention of this disease.

### **Helping You Stay Healthy**

The Peace Corps will provide you with all the necessary inoculations, medications, and information to stay healthy. Upon your arrival in Malawi, you will receive a country-specific medical handbook. By the end of training, you will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first aid needs. The contents of the kit are listed later in this section.

During PST, you will have access to basic medical supplies through the medical officer. However, during this time, you will be responsible for your own supply of prescription drugs and any other specific medical supplies you require, as the Peace Corps will not order these items during training. Please bring a three-month supply of any prescription drugs you use, since they may not be available here and it may take several months for shipments to arrive.

You will have medical physical exams at mid-service and at the end of your service. If you develop a serious medical problem during your service, the medical officer in Malawi will consult with the Office of Medical Services in Washington, D.C., or a regional medical officer. If it is determined that your condition cannot be treated in Malawi, you may be sent out of the country for further evaluation and care.

## **Maintaining Your Health**

As a Volunteer, you must accept considerable responsibility for your own health. Proper precautions will significantly reduce your risk of serious illness or injury. The adage “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” becomes extremely important in areas where diagnostic and treatment facilities are not up to the standards of the United States. The most important of your responsibilities in Malawi is to take the following preventive measures:

*Malaria* is hyper-endemic and is present throughout the year and in most of the country. It can be lethal if left untreated, so prevention and early recognition of infection are extremely important. It is mandatory that you take malaria prophylaxis, and other preventive measures are strongly encouraged. You will learn how to do a blood slide to make the diagnosis, how to use malaria rapid test kit, and how to start emergency malaria treatment.

*Rabies* is prevalent throughout the region, and you will receive a series of rabies immunizations during your training period.

*Schistosomiasis*, or bilharzia, is a parasitic infection that is contracted by swimming in infected water. Lake Malawi and most other bodies of water in the country harbor the parasite. You can prevent contracting this parasite by avoiding swimming in known contaminated water. Symptoms and signs of the infection may take some time to develop, so everyone will be presumptively treated at the end of service.

*HIV* is very prevalent in Malawi. In 2007, the UNAIDS reported that 12.1 percent of Malawi’s adult population is HIV-positive. AIDS is an incurable, fatal disease. This and other STIs are far more common on this continent than in the United States.

Many illnesses that afflict Volunteers worldwide are entirely preventable if proper food and water precautions are taken. These illnesses include food poisoning, parasitic infections, hepatitis A, dysentery, Guinea worm, African trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness), tapeworm, and typhoid fever. Your medical officer will discuss specific standards for water and food preparation in Malawi during PST.

Abstinence is the most effective way to prevent infection with HIV and other STIs. You are taking risks if you choose to be sexually active. To lessen risk, use a condom every time you have sex. Whether your partner is a host country citizen, a fellow Volunteer, or anyone else, do not assume this person is free of HIV/AIDS or other STIs. You will receive more information from the medical officer about this important issue.

Volunteers are expected to adhere to an effective means of birth control to prevent an unplanned pregnancy. Contraceptive medications (in generic form) are available without charge from the medical officer.

It is critical to your health and mandatory that you promptly report to the medical office or other designated facility for scheduled immunizations, and that you let the medical officer know immediately about any significant illnesses and injuries.

## **Women’s Health Information**

If feminine hygiene products are not available for you to purchase on the local market, the Peace Corps medical officer in Malawi will provide them. If you require a specific product, please bring a three-month supply with you. Many female Volunteers take menstrual cups (The Diva Cup, The Keeper, The Moon Cup, etc.) to avoid potential problems with availability or disposal of feminine hygiene products.

Pregnancy is treated in the same manner as other Volunteer health conditions that require medical attention. The Peace Corps is responsible for determining the medical risk and the availability of appropriate medical care if the Volunteer chooses to remain in-country. Given the circumstances under which Volunteers live and work in Peace Corps countries, it is rare that the Peace Corps' medical standards for continued service during pregnancy can be met.

The Peace Corps follows the 2012 U.S. Preventive Services Task Force guidelines for screening PAP smears, which recommend women aged 21–29 receive screening PAPs every three years and women aged 30–65 receive screening PAPs every five years. As such, most Volunteers will not receive a PAP during their service, but can use Peace Corps supplied health insurance after service to have an exam.

### **Your Peace Corps Medical Kit**

The Peace Corps medical officer will provide you with a kit that contains basic items necessary to prevent and treat illnesses that may occur during service. Kit items can be periodically restocked at the medical office.

### **Medical Kit Contents**

(some items may be locally available equivalents)

First Aid Handbook	Decongestant
Ace bandages	Dental floss
Acetaminophen (Tylenol)	Gloves
Adhesive tape	Hydrocortisone cream
Antacid tablets	Ibuprofen
Anti-diarrheal (Imodium)	Insect repellent
Antibiotic ointment	Iodine tablets (for water purification)
Antifungal cream	Lip balm
Antihistamine	Oral rehydration salts
Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner	Scissors
Band-Aids	Sore throat lozenges
Bismuth Subsalicylate (Pepto-Bismol)	Sterile eye drops
Butterfly closures	Sterile gauze pads
Calagel anti-itch gel	Sunscreen
Condoms	Thermometer (Temp-a-dots)
Cough lozenges	Tweezers

### **Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist**

If there has been any change in your health—physical, mental, or dental—since you submitted your examination reports to the Peace Corps, you must immediately notify the Office of Health Services (OHS). Failure to disclose new illnesses, injuries, allergies, or pregnancy can endanger your health and may jeopardize your eligibility to serve.

If your dentist or Peace Corps dental consultant has recommended that you undergo dental treatment or repair, you must complete that work and make sure your dentist sends requested confirmation reports or X-rays to the Office of Health Services.

If you wish to avoid having duplicate vaccinations, bring a copy of your immunization record to your pre-departure orientation. If you purchase any immunizations prior to Peace Corps service that are not listed as requirement in your Medical Applicant Portal, the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for the cost. The Peace Corps will provide all the immunizations necessary for your overseas assignment. Volunteers must



be willing to get all required vaccinations unless there is a documented medical contraindication. Failure to accept required vaccination is grounds for administrative separation from the Peace Corps. You do not need to begin taking malaria medication prior to departure.

Bring a three-month supply of any prescription or over-the-counter medication you use on a regular basis, including birth control pills. Although the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for this three-month supply, it will order refills during your service. While awaiting shipment—which can take several months—you will be dependent on your own medication supply. The Peace Corps will not pay for herbal or nonprescribed medications, such as St. John's wort, glucosamine, selenium, or antioxidant supplements. Medications supplied may be generic or equivalent to your current medications.

You are encouraged to bring copies of medical prescriptions signed by your physician. This is not a requirement, but they might come in handy if you are questioned in transit about carrying a three-month supply of prescription drugs.

If you wear eyeglasses, bring two pairs (of the current prescription) with you. If a pair breaks, the Peace Corps will replace them, using the information your doctor in the United States provided on the eyeglasses form during your examination. The Peace Corps Office of Health Services strongly discourages Volunteers from wearing contact lenses while overseas unless there is a true medical indication documented by your ophthalmologist. Contact lenses, particularly extended use soft contacts, are associated with a variety of eye infections and other inflammatory problems. One of the most serious of these problems is infectious keratitis which can lead to severe cornea damage which could result in permanent blindness requiring corneal transplantation. These risks of permanent eye damage are exacerbated in the Peace Corps environment where the Volunteer's ability to properly clean the lenses is compromised due to limited access to sterile water as well as decreased effectiveness of cleaning solutions due to prolonged storage in unsatisfactory conditions. In addition, when bacterial eye infections occur, assessment and treatment within hours by a competent ophthalmologist is indicated. This is virtually impossible in the Peace Corps setting. If you feel that you simply must be able to use your contacts occasionally, please consider using single use, daily disposable lenses which do not require cleaning.

If you are eligible for Medicare, are over 50 years of age, or have a health condition that may restrict your future participation in health-care plans, you may wish to consult an insurance specialist about unique coverage needs before your departure. The Peace Corps will provide all necessary health care from the time you leave for your pre-departure orientation until you complete your service. When you finish, you will be entitled to the post-service health care benefits described in the Peace Corps Volunteer Handbook. You may wish to consider keeping an existing health plan in effect during your service if you think age or pre-existing conditions might prevent you from re-enrolling in your current plan when you return home.



## SAFETY AND SECURITY IN DEPTH

Ensuring the safety and security of Volunteers is the Peace Corps' highest priority. Serving as a Volunteer overseas entails certain safety and security risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment, a limited understanding of the local language and culture, and the perception of being a wealthy American are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Property theft and burglaries are not uncommon. Incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although most Volunteers complete their two years of service without a serious safety and security incident. Together, the Peace Corps and Volunteers can reduce risk, but cannot truly eliminate all risk.

Beyond knowing that the Peace Corps approaches safety and security as a partnership with you, it might be helpful to see how this partnership works. The Peace Corps has policies, procedures, and training in place to promote your safety. The Peace Corps depends on you to follow those policies and to put into practice what you have learned. An example of how this works in practice—in this case to help manage the risk and impact of burglary—follows:

- The Peace Corps assesses the security environment where you will live and work.
- The Peace Corps inspects the house where you will live according to established security criteria.
- The Peace Corps ensures you are welcomed by host country counterparts or other community leaders in your new community.
- The Peace Corps responds to security concerns that you raise.
- You lock your doors and windows.
- You adopt a lifestyle appropriate to the community where you live.
- You get to know your neighbors.
- You decide if purchasing personal articles insurance is appropriate for you.
- You don't change residences before being authorized by the Peace Corps.
- You communicate your concerns to Peace Corps staff.

This welcome book contains sections on Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle, Peace Corps Training, Your Health Care, and Safety and Security, all of which include important safety and security information to help you understand this partnership. The Peace Corps makes every effort to give Volunteers the training and tools they need to function in the safest way possible and prepare for the unexpected, teaching you to identify, reduce, and manage the risks you may encounter.

### **Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk**

There are several factors that can heighten a Volunteer's risk, many of which are within the Volunteer's control. By far the most common crime that Volunteers experience is theft. Thefts often occur when Volunteers are away from their sites, in crowded locations (such as markets or on public transportation), and when leaving items unattended.

Before you depart for Malawi there are several measures you can take to reduce your risk:

- Leave valuable objects in the U.S., particularly those that are irreplaceable or have sentimental value
- Leave copies of important documents and account numbers with someone you trust in the U.S.
- Purchase a hidden money pouch or "dummy" wallet as a decoy
- Purchase personal articles insurance

After you arrive in Malawi, you will receive more detailed information about common crimes, factors that contribute to Volunteer risk, and local strategies to reduce that risk. For example, Volunteers in Malawi learn to do the following:

- Choose safe routes and times for travel, and travel with someone trusted by the community whenever possible
- Make sure one's personal appearance is respectful of local customs
- Avoid high-crime areas
- Know the local language to get help in an emergency
- Make friends with local people who are respected in the community
- Be careful and conscientious about using electronics (phones, cameras, laptops, iPods, etc.) in public or leaving them unattended
- Limit alcohol consumption

As you can see from this list, you must be willing to work hard and adapt your lifestyle to minimize the potential for being a target for crime. As is true anywhere in the world, crime occurs in Malawi. You can reduce your risk by avoiding situations that place you at risk and by taking precautions. Crime at the village or town level is less frequent than in the large cities; people know each other and generally are less likely to steal from their neighbors. Tourist attractions in large towns are favorite worksites for pickpockets.

The following are other security concerns in Malawi of which you should be aware:

In Lilongwe, the capital, there are certain areas where robberies and muggings are more frequent. These will be pointed out to you, and you are advised to either avoid walking in these areas altogether or make sure you are not alone if you must travel through these areas.

The most important safety issue is travel on the roads. Public transport in Malawi is rudimentary to say the least. Vehicles are often in poor condition, overcrowded, and travel too fast. The roads themselves are often in a state of disrepair. It is important to use common sense in these situations and, if you are uncomfortable, make sure you voice your concern to the driver. Motor vehicle accidents, although infrequent, are the biggest cause of fatalities and serious medical problems among Volunteers.

While whistles and exclamations may be fairly common on the street, this behavior can be reduced if you dress conservatively, abide by local cultural norms, and respond according to the training you will receive.

### **Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime**

Because many Volunteer sites are in rural, isolated settings, you must be prepared to take on a large degree of responsibility for your own safety. To reduce the likelihood that you will become a victim of crime, you can take steps to make yourself less of a target such as ensuring your home is secure and developing relationships in your community. While the factors that contribute to your risk in Malawi may be different, in many ways you can do what you would do if you moved to a new city anywhere: Be cautious, check things out, ask questions, learn about your neighborhood, know where the more risky locations are, use common sense, and be aware. You can reduce your vulnerability to crime by integrating into your community, learning the local language, acting responsibly, and abiding by Peace Corps policies and procedures. Serving safely and effectively in Malawi will require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

## **Support from Staff**

If a trainee or Volunteer is the victim of a safety and security incident, Peace Corps staff is prepared to provide support. All Peace Corps posts have procedures in place to respond to incidents of crime committed against Volunteers. The first priority for all posts in the aftermath of an incident is to ensure the Volunteer is safe and receiving medical treatment as needed. After assuring the safety of the Volunteer, Peace Corps staff response may include reassessing the Volunteer's worksite and housing arrangements and making any adjustments, as needed. In some cases, the nature of the incident may necessitate a site or housing transfer. Peace Corps staff will also support and assist Volunteers who choose to make a formal complaint with local law enforcement. It is very important that a Volunteer reports an incident when it occurs. The reasons for this include obtaining medical care and emotional support, enabling Peace Corps staff to assess the situation to determine if there is an ongoing safety and security concern, protecting peer Volunteers and preserving the right to file a complaint. Should a Volunteer decide later in the process to file a complaint with law enforcement, this option may be compromised if evidence was not preserved at the time of the incident.

## **Office of Victim Advocacy**

The Office of Victim Advocacy (OVA) is a resource to Volunteers who are victims of crime, including sexual assault and stalking. Victim advocates are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to help Volunteers understand their emotional, medical, and legal options so they may make informed decisions to meet their specific needs. The OVA provides a compassionate, coordinated, and supportive response to Volunteers who wish to access Peace Corps support services.

Contact information for the Office of Victim Advocacy

Direct phone number: 202.692.1753

Toll-free: 855.855.1961 ext. 1753

Duty phone: 202.409.2704 (available 24/7, call or text)

Email: [victimadvocate@peacecorps.gov](mailto:victimadvocate@peacecorps.gov)

## **Crime Data for Malawi**

Crime data and statistics for Malawi, which are updated yearly, are available at the following link:

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/countrydata/malawi>.

Please take the time to review this important information.

Few Peace Corps Volunteers are victims of serious crimes. Crimes that do occur abroad are investigated and prosecuted by local jurisdictional authorities. If you are the victim of a crime, you will decide if you wish to file a complaint with law enforcement, who will then determine whether to prosecute. If you decide to file a complaint, the Peace Corps will help through the process. The Peace Corps staff will ensure you are fully informed of your options and understand how the local legal process works. Further, the Peace Corps will help you exercise your rights to the fullest extent possible under the laws of your host country.

The Peace Corps will train you on how to respond if you are the victim of a serious crime, including how to get to a safe location quickly and contact your Peace Corps office. It's important that you notify the Peace Corps as soon as you can so Peace Corps staff can provide assistance.

## **Volunteer Safety Support in Malawi**

The Peace Corps' approach to safety is a five-pronged plan to help you stay safe during your service and includes the following: information sharing, Volunteer training, site selection criteria, a detailed

emergency action plan, and protocols for addressing safety and security incidents. Malawi's in-country safety program is outlined below.

The Peace Corps/Malawi office will keep you informed of any issues that may impact Volunteer safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be provided in Volunteer newsletters and in memorandums from the country director. In the event of a critical situation or emergency, you will be contacted through the emergency communication network. An important component of the capacity of Peace Corps to keep you informed is your buy-in to the partnership concept with the Peace Corps staff. It is expected that you will do your part in ensuring that Peace Corps staff members are kept apprised of your movements in-country so they are able to inform you.

**Volunteer training** will include sessions on specific safety and security issues in Malawi. This training will prepare you to adopt a culturally appropriate lifestyle and exercise judgment that promotes safety and reduces risk in your home, at work, and while traveling. Safety training is offered throughout service and is integrated into the language, cross-cultural aspects, health, and other components of training. You will be expected to successfully complete all training competencies in a variety of areas, including safety and security, as a condition of service.

Certain **site selection criteria** are used to determine safe housing for Volunteers before their arrival. The Peace Corps staff works closely with host communities and counterpart agencies to help prepare them for a Volunteer's arrival and to establish expectations of their respective roles in supporting the Volunteer. Each site is inspected before the Volunteer's arrival to ensure placement in appropriate, safe, and secure housing and worksites. Site selection is based, in part, on any relevant site history; access to medical, banking, postal, and other essential services; availability of communications, transportation, and markets; different housing options and living arrangements; and other Volunteer support needs.

You will also learn about Peace Corps/Malawi's **detailed emergency action plan**, which is implemented in the event of civil or political unrest or a natural disaster. When you arrive at your site, you will complete and submit a site locator form with your address, contact information, and a map to your house. If there is a security threat, you will gather with other Volunteers in Malawi at predetermined locations until the situation is resolved or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

Finally, in order for the Peace Corps to be fully responsive to the needs of Volunteers, it is imperative that Volunteers immediately report any security incident to the Peace Corps office. The Peace Corps has established **protocols for addressing safety and security incidents** in a timely and appropriate manner, and it collects and evaluates safety and security data to track trends and develop strategies to minimize risks to future Volunteers.





## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OVERVIEW

The Peace Corps mission is to promote world peace and friendship and to improve people's lives in the communities where Volunteers serve. Instituting policies and practices to support a diverse and inclusive work and Volunteer environment is essential to achieving this mission.

Through inclusive recruitment and retention of staff and Volunteers, the Peace Corps seeks to reflect the rich diversity of the United States and bring diverse perspectives and solutions to development issues. Additionally, ensuring diversity among staff and Volunteers enriches interpersonal relations and communications for the staff work environment, the Volunteer experience, and the communities in which Volunteers serve.

The Peace Corps defines diversity as a “collection of individual attributes that together help agencies pursue organizational objectives efficiently and effectively. These include, but are not limited to, characteristics such as national origin, language, race, color, disability, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, veteran status, and family structures. Diversity also encompasses differences among people concerning where they are from and where they have lived and their differences of thought and life experiences.”

We define inclusion as a “culture that connects each [staff member and Volunteer] to the organization; encourages collaboration, flexibility, and fairness; and leverages diversity throughout the organization so that all individuals are able to participate and contribute to their full potential.” The Peace Corps promotes inclusion throughout the lifecycle of Volunteers and staff. When staff and Volunteers are able to share their rich diversity in an inclusive work environment, the Peace Corps mission is better fulfilled. More information about diversity and inclusion can be found in the Volunteer Handbook.

An inclusive agency is one that seeks input from everyone in an effort to find the best ideas and strategies possible to execute its objectives. When input is solicited, heard, and considered from a rich multitude of individuals the best course of action usually emerges. The Peace Corps seeks to improve its operations and effectiveness by ensuring that all voices and ideas are heard and that all Volunteers and staff feel welcome and appreciated. When each person's voice is heard, the agency is stronger and the impact of Volunteers is strengthened.

### **Diversity and Inclusion at Your Site**

Once Volunteers arrive at their sites, diversity and inclusion principles remain the same but take on a different shape, in which your host community may share a common culture and you—the Volunteer—are the outsider. You may be in the minority, if not the sole person like you, at your site. You will begin to notice diversity of perspectives, age, depth of conversation, and degree of support you may receive. For example, elders, youth, and middle-aged individuals all have unique points of views on topics you may discuss, from perspectives on work, new projects, and social engagements to the way community issues are addressed.

Peace Corps staff in your host country recognize the additional adjustment issues that come with living and working in new environments and will provide support and guidance to Volunteers. During pre-service training, a session will be held to discuss diversity and inclusion and how you can serve as an ally for your peers, honoring diversity, seeking inclusion, challenging prejudice and exclusion, exploring your own biases, and learning mechanisms to cope with these adjustment issues. The Peace Corps looks forward to having male and female Volunteers from varied backgrounds that include a variety of races, ethnic groups, ages, religions, sexual orientations, and gender identities. The agency expects you to work collaboratively to create an inclusive environment that transcends differences and finds common ground.

## **Cross-Cultural Considerations**

Outside of Malawi's capital, residents of rural communities might have had little direct exposure to other cultures, races, religions, and lifestyles. What people view as typical U.S. behavior or norms may be a misconception, such as the belief that all Americans are rich and have blond hair and blue eyes. The people of Malawi are known for their generous hospitality to foreigners; however, members of the community where you will live may display a range of reactions to cultural differences that you present.

As a Volunteer and representative of the United States, you are responsible not only for sharing the diversity of U.S. culture (to include your individual culture and the culture of other Americans) with your host country national counterparts, but also for learning from the diversity of your host country. An important aspect of this cultural exchange will be to demonstrate inclusiveness within your community in a sensitive manner. Additionally, you will share the responsibility of learning about the diversity of your fellow Peace Corps Volunteers and exploring how best to respect differences while serving as supportive allies as you go through this challenging new experience.

To ease the transition and adapt to life in your host country, you may need to make some temporary, yet fundamental, compromises in how you present yourself as an American and as an individual. For example, female trainees and Volunteers may not be able to exercise the independence they have in the United States; political discussions need to be handled with great care; and some of your personal beliefs may best remain undisclosed. You will need to develop techniques and personal strategies for coping with these and other limitations. The Peace Corps staff will lead diversity, inclusion, and sensitivity discussions during pre-service training and will be on call to provide support. This training covers how to adapt personal choices and behavior to be respectful of the host country culture, which can have a direct impact on how Volunteers are viewed and treated by their new communities. The Peace Corps emphasizes professional behavior and cross-cultural sensitivity among Volunteers and within their communities to help integrate and be successful during service.

An ideal way to view the pursuit of cross-cultural adaptation and/or cultural integration is to recognize that everything done in your host country has both a specific reason for why it is done and an expected outcome. Trust that your host country counterparts are acting with positive intentions and work to mutually seek understanding and commonality. Language differences may add a communication barrier and lead to misunderstandings. Listen more than you speak and seek clarity. Remember that having the ability to laugh at yourself and at life's little surprises goes a long way—laughter is universal.

## **Overview of Diversity in Malawi**

The Peace Corps staff in Malawi recognizes the adjustment issues that come with diversity and will endeavor to provide support and guidance. During PST, several sessions will be held to discuss diversity and coping mechanisms. We look forward to having male and female Volunteers from a variety of races, ethnic groups, ages, religions, and sexual orientations, and hope that you will become part of a diverse group of Americans who take pride in supporting one another and demonstrating the richness of American culture.

## **What Might a Volunteer Face?**

### **Possible Gender Role Issues**

Gender is a set of socially constructed roles, responsibilities, behaviors, and opportunities. Gender differs from sex, which refers specifically to biological and physiological characteristics of males and females. Gender roles and expectations are learned, change over time, and vary within and among cultures. Volunteers are trained in gender awareness as they approach their work in the host country. Gender roles in the United States may differ greatly from those in your country of service. It is important to absorb and

to attempt to understand the cultural nuances of gender where you are. For example, in many cultures males are held in higher regard than females and females may manage the households. In some places, females are encouraged to attend school, while in other countries females are discouraged from engaging in such activities and instead work inside or outside of the home.

During the pre-service training, trainees receive an introduction to gender awareness in their country of service, and examine their own thinking about gender roles and how this thinking has impacted them. They then learn how to analyze development projects using a gender lens to better understand gender roles in their host country and to understand how these gender roles can benefit or limit what females and males may or may not do. During their 27 months of service, Volunteers will further engage in gender trainings to understand better how their gender identity impacts who they are as females or males in the host country and how this perception influences their work and relationships.

Distinct roles and responsibilities are expected to be fulfilled by men and women in Malawian culture and gender stereotypes will likely be considered traditional by most Americans. Female Volunteers may often meet extremely conservative attitudes regarding gender equality. Likewise, the behavior of female Volunteers is more often scrutinized and criticized than that of their male peers. Although the Peace Corps emphasizes understanding and sensitivity of other cultures, it will be necessary to occasionally explain and defend why you believe something or behave a certain way. Women and men in Malawi are not considered adults until they marry and have children. This being the case, Volunteers should expect curiosity from host country friends regarding their marital status and whether or not they have children.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“Getting people, men in particular, to take me seriously has been a bit of a challenge. Like all things here, it’s a learning experience for everybody. I learn how to get a man’s job done while still being a woman and maybe my community learns a little about gender equality.”

“I need more time for lunch because I have to actually prepare it myself; the male teachers just go home and eat what their wives made. So when they complain that I cannot spend enough time at school after hours, I just tell them that it is hard because I don’t have a wife.”

“I started wearing trousers (instead of skirts). At the beginning, everyone stared and even started to give me the ‘evil eye.’ All talking stopped and then started up again in an irritated hush. After a while, people seem to have gotten used to it, but I’ve definitely had my criticism.”

### **Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color**

Volunteers of color sometimes, but not always, have a different Peace Corps experience than Caucasian Volunteers. Because of limited exposure, some foreign nationals will expect to see U.S. citizens who are white. Cultures of the world do not typically envision the States as a place of rich diversity with various culturally acceptable perspectives, personalities, and characteristics. Thus, a Volunteer of color may be questioned as about their U.S. citizenship.

In places where American stereotypes and/or caste system dynamics influence perception, Volunteers of color should be mindful of the reasons for these views without creating contentious environments. All too often, host country nationals are simply unaware of the diversity of the United States and require additional information and dialogue. Direct interactions with someone new or something different can take time to get used to, but those who take the time tend to be better off. Although host country nationals may assert that the United States is made up of predominately one race, we know that is not true. If a member of your community knows of compatriots living in the United States or of notable U.S. citizens of color, you can build on this knowledge as a point of reference for discussing diversity within the States.

For Volunteers of color, the range of responses to their skin color may vary from the extremely kind to the very insensitive. In African and Latin American countries, host country nationals may say “welcome home” to African Americans or Hispanic Americans. Sometimes Volunteers expect to be “welcomed home” but are disappointed when they are not. More commonly, if a Volunteer is mistaken for a host-country national citizen, he or she is expected to behave as a male or female in that culture behaves, and to speak the local language fluently. Host country nationals are sometimes frustrated when the Volunteer does not speak the local language with ease. Conversely, some in the same country may call you a “sell out” because they feel the United States has not done enough to help with social issues. These instances can be turned into teachable moments for the Volunteer and the host country national, in which the Volunteer can ask questions surrounding perception and collaborate with respect to issues and projects at hand, while engaging in cross-cultural exchanges. All Volunteers should be mindful of the issues of race that are embedded in U.S. culture and within the culture in your country of service. These issues may significantly affect how Volunteers interact with fellow Volunteers and host country nationals. Being open and inclusive to everyone will improve your experience in interacting with fellow Volunteers and members of your host community.

The average Malawian has never had the opportunity to interact with people from diverse backgrounds. If you are black, you are called African. If you are Asian, you are called either Chinese or Japanese. If you are South Asian, you are called Indian. If you are white, you are called British or American. If you are Hispanic, you are called Mexican. The possibility of another ethnicity simply does not occur to Malawians you will meet in the villages. Be prepared to tolerate and repeatedly explain that some terms used in Malawi are considered derogatory in America (e.g., “colored,” “half caste,” or “Chinaman”). It is also important to be aware of the long-standing influence of South Africa. Malawi was one of the only countries to deal openly with the old South African apartheid government, and some of the racial perceptions from that era have influenced Malawian reactions to people.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“One problem I have had is being truthful about my ethnic background. I feel that I would not be accepted by my community if I was truthful.”

“Walking around my village, I can always expect that as soon as the children see me they will begin shouting, ‘China! China! China!’ It makes me feel angry sometimes, especially on those days where I am already feeling a bit self-conscious just for being different. That, and the fact that I’m Korean.”

“I feel really frustrated and disappointed at being asked by some Malawians, ‘What are you?’ When I answer, ‘African-American’ or ‘Black American,’ Malawians are genuinely shocked or amazed. Oftentimes, Malawians will regard this with disbelief or they will ask me, ‘But where are your parents from?’ or ‘You are not a real American, are you?’”

### **Possible Issues for 50+ Volunteers**

Senior Volunteers may find their age an asset in Malawi. They will often have access to individuals and insights that are not available to younger Volunteers. On the other hand, they will be in a distinct minority within the Volunteer population and could find themselves feeling isolated, looked up to, or ignored.

Seniors are often accustomed to a greater degree of independence and freedom of movement than the Peace Corps’ program focus and safety and security practices allow. Pre-service training can be particularly stressful for seniors, whose lifelong learning styles and habits may or may not lend themselves to the techniques used. A senior may be the only older person in a group of Volunteers and initially may not feel part of the group. Younger Volunteers may look to an older Volunteer for advice and support; some seniors find this to be an enjoyable experience, while others choose not to fill this role.

Some seniors may find it difficult to adapt to a lack of structure and clarity in their role after having worked for many years in a very structured and demanding job.

More than younger Volunteers, older Volunteers may have challenges in maintaining lifelong friendships and dealing with financial matters from afar. They may want to consider assigning power of attorney to someone in the States.

Age also affects how you will be treated. While Malawians traditionally have a reverence for age, Malawi's legal retirement age is 60. Hence, older Volunteers may be respected for their wisdom, but may find difficulty in being accepted at the workplace. Malawians are especially curious about older female Volunteers. They are puzzled as to why they have no spouse or children, even if they have the pictures to prove otherwise.

### **Volunteer Comment**

“Being seen as everyone's grandmother can be a good and a bad thing. I find that people are respectful and accommodating to my lifestyle while I'm at home, but tend to see me as funny or strange in the work environment.”

### **Possible Issues for Volunteer Couples**

Before committing to Peace Corps service, couples should consider how different degrees of enthusiasm about Peace Corps service, adaptation to the physical and cultural environment, and homesickness will affect their lives. It can be helpful to recognize that your reactions to these issues will change throughout your service, and you may not always feel the same as your partner. You and your partner will have different jobs, different schedules, and different societal pressures. One partner may learn the language faster than the other or have a more satisfying assignment. This can create competition and put different kinds of stress on each person. Anticipating how these pressures will affect you and your partner differently throughout your service can help you remain a source of support for each other. Making friends with other Volunteers is a critical part of fitting into the larger volunteer culture and can also be a good way to expand your support network.

While couples will live together during their service, they may live in separate towns during their pre-service training. This is a stressful time for most Volunteers, and it can be helpful to discuss in advance how you will deal with this potential separation. Your partner can be an important source of stability but can also add stress to your training experience. You may feel torn between traveling to visit your partner and focusing on your training, your host family, and friends you have made at your training site.

Couples often face pressure from host country nationals to change their roles to conform better with traditional Malawian relationships. Malawian men and women alike will often not understand American relationship dynamics and may be outwardly critical of relationships that do not adhere to traditional gender roles. It is also helpful to think about how pressures to conform to Malawian culture can be challenging to men and women in very different ways. Considering how your partner is being affected and discussing what, if any, aspects of your relationship should be changed can help reduce stress for you both.

### **Possible Issues for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning/Queer, Ally (LGBTQA) Volunteers**

For LGBTQA Volunteers: Given Malawi's traditional values, sexual orientation and non-conforming gender identities might not be discussed openly. In some cases, the LGBTQA community may be stigmatized and same-sex sexual activity is illegal. Mindful of the cultural norms and country-specific laws, the decision to serve openly is left to each individual Peace Corps Volunteer. Many LGBTQA Volunteers have chosen to be discreet about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity within their



host communities. Some LGBTQ Volunteers have chosen to come out to community members, with a result of positive and negative reactions, while some have come out only to select Peace Corps staff and Volunteers. Dealing with questions about boyfriends, girlfriends, marriage, and children may, at times, be stressful for LGBTQ Volunteers. You may find that Malawi is a less open and inclusive environment than you have previously experienced. Please know, however, that Peace Corps is supportive of you and Peace Corps staff welcomes dialogue about how to ensure your success as an LGBTQA Volunteer. More information about serving as an LGBTQ Volunteer is available at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Peace Corps Alumni website at [lgbprcv.org](http://lgbprcv.org). Additionally, the Peace Corps' LGBTQ employee resource group, Spectrum, can be reached at [spectrum@peacecorps.gov](mailto:spectrum@peacecorps.gov).

**For Ally Volunteers:** Peace Corps staff intends to create open, inclusive, and accepting environments. As an agency, the Peace Corps encourages Volunteers to serve as allies to their LGBTQ colleagues in order to create a safe environment.

Many LGBTQ Volunteers have served successfully in Malawi and have very fond memories of their community and service. LGBTQA support groups may be available in your country of service, providing a network to support the needs of the Peace Corps LGBTQA community. Peace Corps staff will work with Volunteers to provide them with locally informed perspectives.

Gay, lesbian, and bisexual Volunteers must know that Malawi is still a very conservative society. Many Malawians are in denial that homosexuality actually exists in their culture. Thus, any display of your sexual orientation may be severely frowned upon. Most previous Volunteers have decided to serve their time in Malawi under a cloak of silence. Some gay, lesbian, and bisexual Volunteers expressed that if they were to display their sexual orientation, it would have had adverse effects on their relationships with their community and co-workers.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“Being in a country where most people don’t know what homosexuality is has been a huge departure from the ‘Is he? Isn’t he?’ culture of America. It’s seen as neither a lifestyle, nor a choice. Homosexuality has taken the role of science fiction.”

“To me, coming out in Malawi isn’t a question. It wouldn’t make sense here. The deep emotions tied to the same experience in the States would fall on deaf ears. At first, I felt alienated because of the white lies I scattered to cover my trail. I came to realize that most of my stress was coming from my own fear, rather than from an unstated threat in the community.”

### **Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers**

Whether you practice a religion or not, you will probably find the Malawian practice of religion different than that in the United States. You will notice how deeply religion is ingrained into the culture just by walking down a city street where signs with religious messages punctuate the front of every third store. Malawians enjoy conversing, and they enjoy religion, so it makes sense that they love conversing about religion. Be prepared to tolerate views very different from your own.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“It cannot be overstated how strongly religion figures into Malawian culture. Attending church for Malawians goes beyond spiritual benefits. It becomes one of the few, or only, large social gatherings the person goes to all week.”

“Although Malawians are very shocked initially to discover that I am not religious, if I am patient and explain my reasons, they do understand.”

**Possible Issues for Volunteers with Disabilities**

As part of the medical clearance process, the Peace Corps Office of Medical Services determined that you were physically and emotionally capable, with or without reasonable accommodations, to perform a full tour of Volunteer service in Malawi without unreasonable risk of harm to yourself or interruption of service. The Peace Corps/Malawi staff will work with disabled Volunteers to make reasonable accommodations for them in training, housing, jobsites, or other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.

There is little of the infrastructure to accommodate individuals with disabilities that has been developed in the United States. Malawians with physical disabilities are treated no differently than any other Malawian. They are expected to complete the same work, but perhaps not through the same methods. Ironically, many Malawians consider the fact that you are a Westerner a serious disability to doing any manual work. They do not believe that Americans are capable of strenuous physical labor.

**Volunteer Comment**

“I have a slight hearing loss in both my ears. Sometimes this makes my job a little bit tougher, but in general, if I tell Malawians they need to speak louder, they will accommodate me. But I do get frustrated at times. Honestly, though, I think that any frustration I encounter here caused by my hearing disability would be little different than any frustration I might encounter back home in the States.”



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Malawi?**

Most airlines have baggage size and weight limits and assess charges for transport of baggage that exceeds those limits. The Peace Corps has its own size and weight limits and will not pay the cost of transport for baggage that exceeds these limits. The Peace Corps' allowance is two checked pieces of luggage with combined dimensions of both pieces not to exceed 107 inches (length + width + height) and a carry-on bag with dimensions of no more than 45 inches. Checked baggage should not exceed 100 pounds total with a maximum weight of 50 pounds for any one bag.

Peace Corps Volunteers are not allowed to take pets, weapons, explosives, radio transmitters (shortwave radios are permitted), automobiles, or motorcycles to their overseas assignments. Do not pack flammable materials or liquids such as lighter fluid, cleaning solvents, hair spray, or aerosol containers. This is an important safety precaution.

### **What is the electric current in Malawi?**

Roughly 220–240 volts, 50 cycles; it may range from 190 volts to 260 volts when it is on. Less than half of Volunteers have electricity at work or at home. Batteries are available; D cells are more easily found than C cells. Bring a charger and rechargeable batteries in all sizes.

### **How much money should I bring?**

Volunteers are expected to live at the same level as the people in their community. You will be given a settling-in allowance and a monthly living allowance, which should cover your expenses. Volunteers often wish to bring additional money for vacation travel to other countries. Credit cards and traveler's checks are preferable to cash. If you choose to bring extra money, bring the amount that will suit your own travel plans and needs.

### **When can I take vacation and have people visit me?**

Each Volunteer accrues two vacation days per month of service (excluding training). Leave may not be taken during training, the first three months of service, or the last three months of service, except in conjunction with an authorized emergency leave. Family and friends are welcome to visit you after PST and the first three months of service as long as their stay does not interfere with your work. Extended stays at your site are not encouraged and may require permission from your country director. The Peace Corps is not able to provide your visitors with visa, medical, or travel assistance.

### **Will my belongings be covered by insurance?**

The Peace Corps does not provide insurance coverage for personal effects; Volunteers are ultimately responsible for the safekeeping of their personal belongings. However, you can purchase personal property insurance before you leave. If you wish, you may contact your own insurance company; additionally, please do research other options. One is available through Clements Worldwide. Volunteers should not ship or take valuable items overseas. Jewelry, watches, radios, cameras, and expensive appliances are subject to loss, theft, and breakage, and in many places, satisfactory maintenance and repair services are not available.

### **Do I need an international driver's license?**

Volunteers in Malawi do not need an international driver's license because they are prohibited from operating privately owned motorized vehicles, except in specific circumstances. Most urban travel is by bus or taxi. Rural travel ranges from buses and minibuses to trucks, bicycles, and lots of walking.

**What should I bring as gifts for Malawi friends and my host family?**

This is not a requirement. A token of friendship is sufficient. Some gift suggestions include knickknacks for the house; pictures, books, or calendars of American scenes; souvenirs from your area; hard candies that will not melt or spoil; or photos to give away.

**Where will my site assignment be when I finish training and how isolated will I be?**

Peace Corps trainees are not assigned to individual sites until after they have completed PST. This gives Peace Corps staff the opportunity to assess each trainee's technical and language skills prior to assigning sites, in addition to finalizing site selections with their ministry counterparts. If feasible, you may have the opportunity to provide input on your site preferences, including geographical location, distance from other Volunteers, and living conditions. However, keep in mind that many factors influence the site selection process and that the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you would ideally like to be. Ultimately, the final site assignment decision lies with the associate Peace Corps director and program team in-country. Most Volunteers live in small towns or in rural villages and are usually within one hour or so from another Volunteer. Some sites require a 12-hour or more drive to the capital.

**How can my family contact me in an emergency?**

The Peace Corps' Counseling and Outreach Unit (COU) provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, instruct your family to notify the Counseling and Outreach Unit immediately if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member. During normal business hours, the number for the Counseling and Outreach Unit is 855.855.1961, select option 1, ext. 1470; or directly at 202.692.1470. After business hours, on weekends, and on holidays, the COU duty officer can be reached at the same number. For non-emergency questions, your family can get information from your country desk staff through the main Peace Corps number at 855.855.1961.

**Can I call home from Malawi?**

Yes, calling home with cellphones is possible but bear in mind that calls from Malawi to the United States are very expensive. Many PCVs choose to text and email rather than call home or arrange for their families to call them at certain times. Please keep in mind that phone cards do not work in Malawi.

**Should I bring a cellphone with me?**

Basic cellphones can be purchased in Malawi. As you can imagine, these phones are not the highest quality and they typically do not have many modern features (such as Internet access, camera, etc.), as the Peace Corps only requires them for basic communication purposes. However, these telephones do tend to be reliable.

If you decide to bring a phone to Malawi, please be sure that it has the following specifications:

1. SIM card compatible
2. Unlocked (many companies in the U.S. network lock their phones and, with a code from the provider you can unlock it, allowing you to insert a different company's SIM card)
3. GSM compatible

Another factor to consider:

1. Many Volunteers prefer Internet phones as they are cheaper than using the Internet cafes and you have access wherever you can get a signal

If you decide to bring your own phone, please keep in mind the following:

1. The Peace Corps is not requiring you to buy a phone in the U.S. before you depart or to use the one you own now once you arrive in Malawi.
2. The Peace Corps will not reimburse you for a phone purchased in the U.S. if you cannot get it to work in Malawi and will not reimburse you if your phone is lost during your service. For loss, this is the case whether you buy your phone locally in Malawi or bring one from the U.S.

**Will there be email and Internet access? Should I bring my computer?**

Volunteers have opportunities for Internet access at Internet cafes when visiting the larger towns. There are also Volunteer workstations at the Peace Corps office in Lilongwe. Having your own laptop is not required, but many Volunteers have found it useful in their projects and communication with friends and family. While Volunteers find them useful for work personal purposes, overuse can cause isolation. You would need to be conscious of securing it at your site when not in use. The recommendation is to bring something lightweight and expendable.





## WELCOME LETTERS FROM MALAWIAN VOLUNTEERS

Before I joined Peace Corps, I had never heard of Malawi. Now, I can't imagine life without it. Malawi is such an amazing country with such amazing people — the nicest people you will ever meet. I guarantee it. You are about to embark on a wonderful journey that will surely be difficult at times, but that will shape your life and teach you things you never knew you even had to learn. Remember to always keep a positive outlook, be able to laugh at yourself, ask for help when you need it, and leave your family and friends with great package ideas (like chewing gum and chocolate). You're going to have the time of your life, and the people you will meet, both Malawian and other Volunteers, will be the best you've met in your lifetime. Get psyched!

### *Health Volunteer in Central Region*

The first two months, although you have all the adrenaline of finally “living in Africa,” are a bit difficult. Give your address to family and friends, and tell them to start writing before you leave because receiving letters during training is a source of great encouragement. Letters take three to six weeks to arrive. It is really fun to receive “bubbled envelopes” with small chocolates or photos inside, and they arrive quicker than a box package. During training, you will be living with a Malawian family in villages, so don't expect access to phone or email those first two months. Don't worry! Though you make incredible friends here after training, you will have plenty of access to communication with those at home.

### *Health Volunteer in Northern Region*

I have learned to never underestimate the importance of community integration. Once a Volunteer has formed relationships with the people in their community, they feel more liberated and are trusted to try new projects and ideas. It is also easier to get help and answers from surrounding communities with previously established trust between the Volunteer and their community. I am of the opinion that community integration is the most important aspect of staying at site. This is not only for the sake of production, but for the sake of the Volunteer's happiness and willingness to stay at site and work hard to the best of their ability. The only suggestion I could make to new trainees or Volunteers on the basis of community integration would be the importance of forming both social and working relationships, with an emphasis on learning the local language. The better a Volunteer is in the language of their area, the easier community integration will be. That Volunteer instantly becomes more trusted and more accessible in the eyes of the community. Once a community feels the Volunteer is accessible and trustworthy, they will be more willing to come to them with ideas, and will be more willing to try new ideas the Volunteer might suggest.

### *Environment Volunteer in Southern Region*

When I first saw my house, I knew that I wanted to live with students. With the help of the headmaster, I selected two boys who are helpful, respectful, and hard working to live with me. I have already seen the positive influence I am making on their lives and, just as important, the two of them have given me deeper connection into my community. I am becoming close with both of the families, and these two boys also give me valuable information about both the school and village communities. They are also good translators when I go into the village and try to talk with people in my sloppy way.

### *Education Volunteer in Central Region*

# PACKING LIST

This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Malawi and is based on their experience. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that each experience is individual. There is no perfect list! You obviously cannot bring everything on the list, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. You can always have things sent to you later. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have a 100-pound weight limit on baggage. And remember, you can get almost everything you need in Malawi.

## Bring with you

- A positive attitude

## General Clothing

- Dark-colored clothes
- Bandanas
- Smartwool or other wool-blend socks
- Quality raincoat (lightweight)
- Fleece jacket
- Basic T-shirts and tank tops
- Leggings for women
- Casual trousers for travel and lounging
- Skirts, dresses that reach mid-calf
- Collared shirts
- Lounging clothes (pajamas pants, sweatshirt, etc.)
- Hoodie, sweater, warm shirt
- Lightweight shorts
- Swimsuit
- Many pairs of underwear, bras, sport bras
- Hats
- Non-formfitting cardio pants (for running, playing sports, etc.)

## Shoes

- Favorite closed-toe, comfortable shoes (Chuck Taylor, moccasins, Toms, etc.)
- One pair durable sandals (Teva, Chaco, Keen, etc.)
- Hiking boots

## Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items

- Aloe lotion for sunburns
- Hair clips/pins/rubber bands/headbands
- Body lotion
- Shaving cream
- Toiletries and travel-sized bottles
- Gold Bond or other powder
- Razors

## Electronics

- Camera (with extra batteries if it is not rechargeable) and memory cards
- External hard drive with pictures, music, and movies with protective case

- iPod or MP3 player
- Rechargeable batteries/charger
- Electricity converter

### **Miscellaneous**

- A package of comfort food
- Carabineers
- Bungee cords
- Duct tape
- Games (Uno, Set, Bananagrams, Go Fish, a deck of cards, etc.)
- Headlamp with extra batteries
- Water bottle (Nalgene, Camelbak, etc.)
- Permanent black markers
- Sleeping bag
- Sleeping pad
- Solar-powered or hand-crank flashlight
- Sunglasses
- Pictures of friends and family
- Duffel bag/backpack
- Camping towel
- Multi tool (Leatherman/Swiss Army knife)A good knife with sharpener

### **What Not to Bring**

- Bad attitude
- Dishes
- Flip-flops
- Pillow
- Popcorn
- Salt
- Solar shower

### **Either/or**

- Audio recorder
- Earphone splitters
- Video recorder (Flip, GoPro, etc.)
- Internet phone
- Journal
- E-reader/tablet (Kindle, iPad, etc.)
- Short-wave radio
- Solar charger
- Tent
- Umbrella
- Backpacking stove
- Yoga mat

### **Optional to mail to yourself before you leave**

- A box of hair dye if you color your hair
- Calendar/organizer

- Dictionary
- Medal tongs
- French press
- Gardening gloves
- Portable speakers
- Measuring cups
- Poster/map of the world
- Seeds
- Sewing kit
- Soil test kit
- Spices and extracts
- Teflon/non-stick frying pan
- Zip-top bags

## PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

The following list consists of suggestions for you to consider as you prepare to live outside the United States for two years. Not all items will be relevant to everyone, and the list is not comprehensive.

### Family

- Notify family that they can call the Peace Corps' Counseling and Outreach Unit at any time if there is a critical illness or death of a family member (24-hour phone number: 855.855.1961ext. 1470; or directly at 202.692.1470).
- Give family and friends the Peace Corps On the Home Front handbook.

### Passport/Travel

- Forward to the Peace Corps travel office all paperwork for the Peace Corps passport and visas.
- Verify that your luggage meets the size and weight limits for international travel.
- Obtain a personal passport if you plan to travel after your service ends. (Your Peace Corps passport will expire three months after you finish your service, so if you plan to travel longer, you will need a regular passport.)

### Medical/Health

- Complete any needed dental and medical work.
- If you wear glasses, bring two pairs.
- Arrange to bring a three-month supply of all medications (including birth control pills) you are currently taking.

### Insurance

- Make arrangements to maintain life insurance coverage.
- Arrange to maintain supplemental health coverage while you are away. (Even though the Peace Corps is responsible for your health care during Peace Corps service overseas, it is advisable for people who have pre-existing conditions to arrange for the continuation of their supplemental health coverage. If there is a lapse in coverage, it is often difficult and expensive to be reinstated.)
- Arrange to continue Medicare coverage if applicable.

### Personal Papers

- Bring a copy of your certificate of marriage or divorce.

### Voting

- Register to vote in the state of your home of record. (Many state universities consider voting and payment of state taxes as evidence of residence in that state.)
- Obtain a voter registration card and take it with you overseas.
- Arrange to have an absentee ballot forwarded to you overseas.

### Personal Effects

- Purchase personal property insurance to extend from the time you leave your home for service overseas until the time you complete your service and return to the United States.

### Financial Management

- Keep a bank account in your name in the U.S.
- Obtain student loan deferment forms from the lender or loan service.
- Execute a power of attorney for the management of your property and business.
- Arrange for deductions from your readjustment allowance to pay alimony, child support, and other debts through the Office of Volunteer Financial Operations at 855.855.1961, extension 1770.
- Place all important papers—mortgages, deeds, stocks, and bonds—in a safe deposit box or with an attorney or other caretaker.



## CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS

This list of numbers will help connect you with the appropriate office at Peace Corps headquarters to answer various questions. You can use the toll-free number and extension or dial directly using the local numbers provided. Be sure to leave the toll-free number and extensions with your family so they can contact you in the event of an emergency.

Peace Corps headquarters toll-free number: 855.855.1961, press 1, then extension number (see below)

Peace Corps mailing address: Peace Corps  
Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters  
1111 20th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20526

For Questions About	Staff	Toll-free extension	Direct/Local
Responding to an invitation	Office of Placement	ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Country information	Cara Eandi, Desk Officer	ext. 1822 <a href="mailto:malawi@peacecorps.gov">malawi@peacecorps.gov</a>	202.692.1822
Plane tickets, passports, visas, or other travel matters	CWTSatoTravel	ext. 1170	202.692.1170
Legal clearance:	Office of Placement	ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Medical clearance and forms processing (includes dental)	Screening Nurse	ext. 1500	202.692.1500
Medical reimbursements (handled by a subcontractor)			800.818.8772
Loan deferments, taxes, financial operations		ext. 1770	202.692.1770
Readjustment allowance withdrawals, power of attorney, staging (pre-departure orientation), and reporting instructions	Office of Staging	ext. 1865	202.692.1865
<i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks prior to departure. This information is not available sooner.</i>			
Family emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas) 24 hours	Counseling and Outreach Unit	ext. 1470	202.692.1470
Office of Victim Advocacy		ext. 1753 24 hours (call or text)	202.692.1753 202.409.2704